

December 16, 2015
(November Letter)

Hi Samantha,

It may be my November letter, but since we are in December I am regularly reminded of upcoming Christmas events. As we prepare for our annual pilgrimage to the west coast those memories include the activities and traditions of our student days and Christmas with your mother when she was an infant in Vancouver.

Daegan was born into a Christmas legacy where we would prepare a big dinner on Christmas Eve for our fellow graduate students. Both Fran and I were at UBC in those days and there were usually a number of our friends who spent the Christmas season away from family or for who Christmas was a new and unknown festival. This was our cue to invite them to our place for a fancy meal with all the trimmings. Fran's cooking skills were put to good use.

We usually served ham at the meal in those days since we anticipated that turkey would be part of our extended family's celebrations in the days to come. I have included a photo of our table setting with our wedding dishes from this time. The table and every surface we could find would be stocked with food and the cupboards hid many plates of cookies, squares, and of course Nanaimo Bar that had been prepared over the previous days. We learned early in the process that these sweets needed to be out of sight before the guests arrived if they were to last until dessert.



By the time the last guest left, the place would be strewn with dirty plates, near-empty glasses of warm punch, beer bottles, and napkins full of crumbs. If we were lucky, Daegan was curled up fast asleep in the corner of the couch or under the Christmas tree but as the years went by she was more likely kept awake by all the noise and attention.

Once we said our last goodbyes (usually about 11 PM) we would once again spring into action with a whirlwind of cleanup, dish washing, food storage, last minute gift wrapping, and packup. Daegan would be wrapped up in her sleeping togs, all the gifts would be piled into boxes and bags, and we would stuff ourselves and Samwise (our dog) into the VW Beetle for the trek to west 19th avenue to join family at the Shaver household.

We would stagger our way up the steps into another world of festivities. The house would already be full of the remaining Shavers along with the usual 5 or 6 friends who had been invited to stay overnight. We would add our gifts to the enormous pile that began under the Christmas Tree then spread out about half-way across the living room floor, search out space for sleeping somewhere in the already crowded house, try and calm Daegan down after the rejuvenation of another party, and finally collapse on a couch or floor mat that was our designated bed for the night.

These were the days when Peter was only about 7 or 8 year old so Christmas morning was always a trial for him. All his brothers and sisters were much older than he was – and only interested in sleeping – so he had the formidable task of trying to wake one of them up enough to justify opening stockings. His first challenge was to find where they were sleeping, then to convince one to join him in the living room. Even after one would take pity on him there was still the problem of getting to the stockings – which required stepping over the many bodies and sleeping bags spread out across the floor!

These were the days when the “stockings before breakfast” tradition was established. It was probably fortunate that the Reimer legacy of opening gifts one by one had not taken hold yet – otherwise we would still be opening gifts into New Year’s day, given the number of them that had accumulated in the living room. However, it meant that once we had breakfast and the opening had begun, the result was pandemonium as paper flew, squeals of delight erupted, and questions took over – most often “What did you get?” It usually took me about a day or two before I felt like I knew what everyone got as a result of the opening – but I would sometimes be surprised much later when Fran would show up with something new and announce that she had got it at Christmas. Here is a photo of your mother in the middle of the presents – with her toy saxophone.



The rest of Christmas Day was spent in R&R – sleeping, playing with toys, maybe taking a short walk before preparing dinner. Of course we would have enjoyed a lunch with the turkey giblets even as some of us do today. By the time the dinner dishes were washed, the paper stuffed into bags, and the guests had said their goodbyes we were all ready for our beds in anticipation of the Boxing Day events.

Boxing Day was spent at my mother’s place. This was usually a bit more down-scale, but no less full of people and festivities. Whereas the Shaver party was populated by the five kids and their friends, the Reimer one was a gathering of extended family. The Reimers were joined by the Dumvilles, Rudds, Burritts, and sometimes the Pagets for more gift exchanges, food, and plenty of games. In the early days, Daegan was the only child of her generation, but soon Jacquie, Jennifer, Shelley, and Steven became her cohort of cousins. Until that time, she was a centre of attention all on her own and got plenty of attention from her Dumville and Rudd Aunts. I expect that if you were to look at your family tree from those branches you would be surprised at the number of people to whom you are related.

Love,
Bill